

## Community Transport as a Social Justice Issue.



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This paper in shorter form was presented at the ACTA Conference in 2024 to explore the social inclusion and community capacity building role of Community Transport following my own personal experience of the social justice role it fulfills for families. I hope it can frame future messaging about the important role and contribution Community Transport has in not only the transport sector but in the human services sectors as it is critical to addressing social exclusion.

Community Transport [CT] as a social justice issue hit me when my 88 year old mum had a stroke in NSW in 2020 and came to live with us in Victoria. We became clients of CT and it dawned heavily on me how mum- an active participant in her NSW community – needed CT to get out of the house, settle in a new community and even when lockdown struck it remained critical for her independence. I watched and lived it from another perspective. It was more than just an issue of the capacity of our family to drive her to appointments in a new community [ she certainly could not take any other form of transport- in the Yarra Valley there are no public transport options], it was about her maintaining dignity and independence and a life she had lived for at least the past 20 years since dad died.

EV Strengthening Communities since 2018 had been actively involved in assisting organisations with their inclusive volunteering and employment and at the heart of this was people's capacity to participate in opportunities when they experienced barriers to social and economic participation such as disability. Transport was at the heart of participation.

I know it seems self-evident but my social work brain went straight to thinking about all of this through the theoretical lenses of social justice, social inclusion, social equity and social capital. What did the research say?

Transport research has mostly looked at other forms of transport and the issues of social justice being questions of uneven access to places and forms of movement. Social researchers have barely even considered the issue of transport.

*First, the well-developed philosophical approach to social justice has largely overlooked the issue of transport and mobility. Indeed, social justice scholars at best touch on transport in the sidelines, typically to make an unrelated argument....*

*Second, much of the mainstream transport research is still dominated by economists and engineers, who have neither been interested in, nor are very receptive to, the notion of justice within transport.*

*the general public has not been interested in listening to ethical considerations, because of the taken-for-granted success of the private automobile, although the benefits from private automobility are far from ubiquitously delivered across all sectors of society (Lucas, Blumenberg et al. 2011),<sup>1</sup>*

Remember Joe Hockey's famous statement which reminded of me of these ubiquitous benefits-

*"the poorest people" really don't have cars, don't drive very far and, as a result, don't pay as much as people on high incomes for fuel".<sup>2</sup>*

There are a plethora of concepts and terms in the transport literature looking at issues of fairness and access to transport :

- **Mobility Justice** – It focuses more upon safety from violence on transport.
- **Transport Equity** – “A central goal of transportation is to facilitate social and economic opportunities by providing equitable levels of access to affordable and reliable transportation options based on the needs of the populations being served, particularly populations that are traditionally underserved..... the term ‘equity’ means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities ..... And persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.
- **Transport Justice**
- **Transport Disadvantage**
- **Accessibility poverty**
- **Mobility deprivation** <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327097305\\_Perspectives\\_on\\_transport\\_and\\_social\\_justice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327097305_Perspectives_on_transport_and_social_justice)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-15/joe-hockey-poor-people-cars-claim-misleading/5671168>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327097305\\_Perspectives\\_on\\_transport\\_and\\_social\\_justice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327097305_Perspectives_on_transport_and_social_justice)

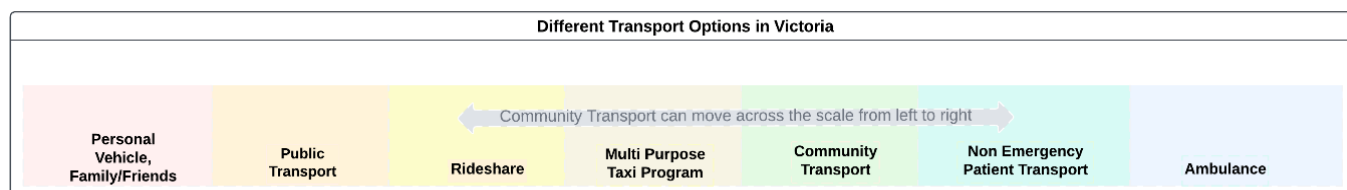
- **The Just City**
- **Distributive justice**
- **Transport related social exclusion** – “[t]he process by which people are prevented from participating in the economic, political and social life of the community because of reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or in part to insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility” (Kenyon, Lyons et al. 2002, p 210-211). <sup>4</sup>

It is with this latter lense of transport related social exclusion that I want to start exploring the concepts of Community Transport and social Inclusion and its antithesis social exclusion.

In this paper I am using the definition of **Community Transport as supported transport** utilised by those who are transport vulnerable and cannot use their own transport, public transport or ride share/taxi’s, the latter often because of stated safety issues. [ Refer Royal Commission into Aged Care]. We know this continuum is not linear but CT is an external facing service providing the transport glue for people with mobility challenges to move around in their community and world, so they stay connected and engaged.

Most recently in a CT Mapping Project in Victoria<sup>5</sup> Community Transport was defined by the CT sector as:

*“ a service designed to support individuals who require additional assistance or are socially isolated, enabling them to access and engage in their local community. It provides access to employment, education, social activities, health and medical appointments, and helps maintain personal independence, operating with a focus on purpose rather than profit.”*



I am not talking about client transport – where an organisation receives funding to transport community to its own services or where a particular service uses its existing staff to transport a client to an appointment or experience as part of their organisational case plan / treatment. Community Transport is a service system utilising supported, trained and supervised drivers to enable people to access and participate in their communities. I acknowledge that funding limitations often require us to restrict what we can do but this does not change the fact CT is an external facing service providing the transport glue for people to move around in their community and world.

The Inner East Primary Care Partnership in 2020 published a Social Inclusion framework to guide actions that will promote social inclusion and an inclusive society. It brought together thinking on social inclusion which it defined as:





<sup>4</sup> Op cit

<sup>5</sup> VTCTA Enhancing Community Transport Services in Victoria. 2024

## DEFINITION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

This Framework adopts the definition of social inclusion described by the Australian Social Inclusion Board (2008 – 2013)

**BEING SOCIALLY INCLUDED MEANS THAT PEOPLE HAVE THE RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CAPABILITIES THEY NEED TO:**

-  **LEARN** participate in education and training
-  **WORK** participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities
-  **ENGAGE** connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities
-  **HAVE A VOICE** influence decisions that affect them



Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2012



This Framework emphasises the relationship between the two key elements of this definition i.e. between having the resources, opportunities and capabilities *in order to* Learn, Work, Engage and Have a Voice. It promotes an approach that addresses the social factors which determine whether people do have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need.

Social Inclusion can also be seen in the context of the International Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) which articulates that everyone has the right to: education (article 26), work (article 23), freely participate in the cultural life of the community (article 27) and to take part in the government of their country (article 21).

This Framework recognises that social inclusion is dynamic (changes over time) and contextual (varies according to circumstance and location).

Figure 1

*Being Socially Included Means That People Have The Resources, Opportunities And Capabilities They Need To:*

- Learn – participate in education and training
- Work – participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities
- Engage – connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities
- Have a Voice – influence decisions that affect them

Ref: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2012

*Our definition of social inclusion has two aspects to it, the **end goal** – for people to Learn, Work, Engage and Have a Voice, and **the means** to this, that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to achieve this end goal,<sup>6</sup>*

*The Framework recognises that social inclusion is dynamic (changes over time) and contextual (varies according to circumstance and location).*

*To Learn, Work And Engage one needs transport to get out of one's house. Is it that simple though? To Learn Work And Engage one needs **Resources, Opportunities And Capabilities**.*

## Let's look at the Means:

- **Resources** – in this case the physical transportation mode.
- **Opportunities** – access to the right transportation mode for your circumstances including type, cost, location / geography.
- **Capabilities**– the capacity to use the right mode of transportation including one's mobility challenges and capacity to afford transport.

<sup>6</sup> Inner East PCP Social Inclusion Framework Dec 2020.

Transport is one of the means needed to achieve the goal of social inclusion and in the case of Community Transport it is the mode of transport needed for those whose capabilities and opportunities are limited through challenges to their physical, circumstantial and geographic mobility.

- Physical Limitations- which prevent them using other forms of transport and require the supported transport we provide.
- Circumstantial- where other social factors impact the needed for supported transport options eg child protection transport.
- Geographic – isolation and geography which prohibits use of other forms of transport.

How many organisations and agencies delivering services to people actually think about how people get to them and the equity issues associated with this ? An example of this is a person we know who had a day placement provided and funded, however they had no way of getting there, so could not attend. The impact of the withdrawal of Non-Emergency Patient Transport services by Ambulance Victoria in 2024 highlighted how dependent the health system is on people being able to get to services. Whole days of renal dialysis were cancelled because people simply had no transport to get there. The impact on people themselves was harrowing.

## Let's look at the antithesis of social Inclusion- Social Exclusion.

*Social exclusion occurs when traits of individuals, families and communities or the circumstances they are in expose them to prejudices and challenges not experienced by others and make it difficult for them to participate in community life. City of Hobart 2014.<sup>7</sup>*

This aspect has been a focus of transport literature.

*Most progress has been made regarding the second dimension of distributive justice, the population groups that deserve particular attention in any social justice analysis, with the social exclusion literature especially contributing to the identification of the most vulnerable groups. The more difficult and contentious issue relates to the appropriate distributive yardstick or justice principle for the transport domain. The debate is complex because strict transport parity is impossible to achieve (as well as undesirable in some instances from an ecological perspective) in practice. Whether travel times, journey quality, mobility (potential or revealed), accessibility, exposures, or any other indicator is adopted as the focal variable, scholars addressing social justice in transport have the difficult challenge to develop systematic arguments in support of alternative justice principles*

This long quote from the 2018 book Perspectives on Transport and Social Justice by Martens and Lucas [a meta analysis of research on transport and social justice] highlight for me:

- transport research generally ignores Community Transport and as such loses the opportunity to assess our important role in overcoming social exclusion or promoting social inclusion. How can systematic academic arguments for a more equitable socially just transport system be made without including us?
- Are we not one of the major appropriate distributive yardsticks for those with challenges to the resources, opportunities and capabilities needed to Learn, Work and Engage?

As a place-based form of transport for those with vulnerabilities we are viable with the right funding and equitable scope and reach. In my view continued lack of resourcing, in Victoria in particular lack of recognition in any government policy and structures, invisibility in literature and research in transport and social policy is actively contributing to Social Exclusion.

*Social exclusion occurs when the institutions that allocate resources and assign value operate in ways that systematically deny some groups the resources, opportunities and recognition that would allow them to participate fully in social life. (Zeitlyn 2004)<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> IEPCP Social Inclusion framework. Dec 2020

<sup>8</sup> IEPCP Social Inclusion Framework dec 2020

The Social Inclusion Framework allows us to demonstrate that Community Transport in addressing the determinants of social inclusion and allowing people to fully participate in social life will:

- Reduce social isolation but not loneliness per se
- Promote social cohesion
- Increase community connection

## Community Transport is also a critical mechanism in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals:

*World leaders recognized unanimously at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) that transportation and mobility are central to sustainable development. Sustainable transportation can enhance economic growth and improve accessibility. Sustainable transport achieves better integration of the economy while respecting the environment. improving social equity, health, resilience of cities, urban-rural linkages and productivity of rural areas..... In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, sustainable transport is mainstreamed across several SDGs and targets,*

It is not just about Electric Vehicles, reduction of fossil fuels and climate change although this is critically important it is equally about SOCIAL EQUITY.

Do we frame our messages on CT as promoting social inclusion? I will come back to this.

## Let's take Social Equity and Social Justice lenses now:

*The Victoria Transport Policy Institute's May 2023 [Evaluating Transportation Equity](#) report outlined five different types of equity, with the first one being "a fair share of resources", ensuring fair public resource allocation.* <sup>9</sup>

Interesting given their lack of recognition of Community Transport- just a sideline!

*The second type is related to **costs**. When travel imposes costs on people, such as delays, dangers and pollution, a fair system would minimise or compensate people for these negative effects. Is the lack of access to supported forms of transport a cost definitionally here?*

***Inclusivity**, the third type of equity .... considers how transport systems serve a range of people with different needs, such as people with disabilities, young people, and the elderly.*

***Affordability**, the fourth type of equity, is important for considering the impact of transportation costs on lower-income people, advocating progressive policies to favour this group.*

***Social justice** was the fifth type of transportation equity cited in the report. This is where the ways transport systems serve underserved and disadvantaged groups across society and aims to address the big structural issues that affect access, such as sexism and racism.*

We can certainly make the argument that Community Transport is a transportation equity issue.

## Let's look at definitions of Social Justice:

A transport lensed definition:

Adli and Chowdhury 2021 concluded in their **A Critical Review of Social Justice Theories in Public Transit Planning**<sup>10</sup>

*Social justice in transportation has been influenced by the political philosophy of justice, namely utilitarianism, libertarianism, egalitarianism, sufficientarianism, the right to the city, and spatial justice theories.....*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://imoveaustralia.com/topics/equity-in-transportation/#:~:text=Social%20justice%20was%20the%20fifth,such%20as%20sexism%20and%20racism>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/8/4289>

Despite the glut of philosophical debates about social justice and the presence of ideas of social justice in transit plans, it has not been explicitly and systematically addressed in the domain of transit planning. Scholars of social justice have sometimes included transportation as a sideline [55,56,57,58,59,60,61]. It is only recently that well-established distributive justice theories [1,19,26,34,56,62,63] have been commonly adopted by transport planners [12,13,14,15] to develop a socially just transport system

A social definition:

*Social justice is about fairness beyond individual justice, it requires systemic and structural social arrangements to improve equality. It results in equal rights for all peoples and the possibility for everyone, without discrimination, to benefit from economic and social progress. (United Nations 2020, National Pro Bono Resource Centre 2011)<sup>11</sup>.*

It's more than EQUITY.

## PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

There are 4 and some cite 5 principles of Social Justice. I have used the Framework and oxfams definitions of the 4 principles commonly cited in Australia here

1. ACCESS- equality of access to goods and services. *Equitable access to opportunities is also important. Everyone should have the right to access education, training, job opportunities and financial resources.* <sup>12</sup>
2. EQUITY- overcoming unfairness caused by unequal access to resources and power. *Providing equal access to resources and opportunities does not mean that everyone will benefit equally. Different people have different needs. Equitable distribution provides people with what they need in order to prosper.*
3. HUMAN RIGHTS- equal, effective legal, industrial. and political rights. *The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) ... everyone has a right to fair and equal treatment and to live in freedom.*
4. PARTICIPATION - opportunities for participation in the decisions which govern our lives. *A society with equal participation will allow a range of perspectives and experiences to be heard and understood by the wider community.*
5. DIVERSITY is the fifth principle - *Diversity refers to the differences that exist between individuals and people groups. Australia is a very diverse multicultural country, which requires a number of measures to be in place to ensure each people group has access to health care and achieves good health outcomes [PDHPE net Health priorities in Australia]<sup>13</sup>*

The PDHPE group note “ Social justice principles refer to values “that favour measures that aim at decreasing or eliminating inequity; promoting inclusiveness of diversity; and establishing environments that are supportive of all people.”

Perhaps there is a 6<sup>th</sup> principle of Supportive Environments- *Supportive environments are environments where “people live, work and play that protect people from threats to health and that increase their ability to make health-promoting choices.”*

Let's apply this lens to Community Transport:

- Is transport not the means to accessing goods and services? Community Transport is about assisting people who otherwise would not be able to access goods and services themselves in community.

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<sup>11</sup> IEPCP Social Inclusion Framework Dec 2020.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/social-justice/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://pdhpe.net/health-priorities-in-australia/how-are-priority-issues-for-australias-health-identified/identifying-priority-health-issues/social-justice-principles/>

It is not about transport of food packages to ones doorstep which could be seen to promote social exclusion if it was a solution to a persons lack of transport options !

- Is Community Transport not the means of providing equal access to goods, services and resources for people who cannot use any other form of transport?
- Do the people who use our services have a right to affordable, accessible transport that meets their needs and doesn't just take them to and from appointments but allows them to live their lives and have a voice in their community?
- Aren't we as Community Transport a response to diversity? We ensure that people who retain some mobility but have no other form of transport are able to get out of their houses and live and participate in community in the way they want to.

Community Transport is therefore a mechanism or means for ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE.

## Finally lets apply a social capital lense:

The Social Inclusion framework argues that social capital is a resource that enables people to Learn, Work, Engage and Have a Voice. The Australian Institute of Family Studies argues that 'social capital' is being looked to as a means of stemming the tide of perceived community decline and widespread distrust associated with it.<sup>14</sup>

There is lots written on Social Capital and many definitions. Here are a few:

*The social capital of a society includes **the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development.** Social capital, however, is not simply the sum of institutions which underpin society, it is also **the glue that holds them together.** It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and **a common sense of 'civic' responsibility, that makes society more than just a collection of individuals.** (World Bank 1998)<sup>15</sup> [ Australian Productivity Commission 2003]*

*Social capital consists **of networks of social relations** which are characterised by **norms of trust and reciprocity.** Combined, it is these elements which are argued to sustain civil society and which enable people to act for mutual benefit (Lochner et al 1998; Winter 2000a); it is 'the **quality of social relationships between individuals that affect their capacity to address and resolve problems they face in common**' (Stewart-Weeks and Richardson 1998: 2).<sup>16</sup> [ AIFS Social Capital Measurement ]*

*Social capital is about the **value of social networks, bonding** similar people and **bridging** between diverse people, with **norms of reciprocity** (Dekker and Uslaner 2001<sup>[11]</sup>; Uslaner 2001<sup>[12]</sup>).<sup>17</sup>..... Dekker and Uslaner (2001)<sup>[11]</sup> posited that social capital is fundamentally about how people interact with each other.*

*A simple way to describe social capital is the **benefits derived from being social.** The core idea of social capital is that **'relationships matter'** and that **social networks are a valuable asset.** That being social and working together is important and valuable.<sup>18</sup> COVID 19 lock downs for the whole society demonstrated what happens when people lose that social connection. Clearly there is a long tail of negative effects that are both psychological and physical. People with disabilities and senior Australia face the same challenges every day without lockdowns.*

This being one of my favourite talking pieces I could go into long diatribes about Social Capital definitions but I won't. Research is clear that people thrive in communities with high social capital and struggle where there is low social capital.

<sup>14</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/measuring-social-capital>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/social-capital/socialcapital.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Op cit

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/what-is-social-capital/>

Quin and Fukuda have noted this:

*The idea is that by increasing mobility, public transport can facilitate [social activities](#) and foster networks and trust among people. This makes it a valuable tool for building social capital, particularly in depopulated areas that are at risk of losing their local networks. 2023<sup>19</sup>*

So do we!

Community Transport promotes social capital by ensuring that people with transport and mobility challenges are able to maintain their existing and build new social relationships by being active and mobile in their communities. We contribute to both bonding and bridging social capital.

We are also a product of high social capital through our volunteer driver base. It is the norms of reciprocity that bring them to the service.

Good old Wikipedia<sup>20</sup> defines the norms of reciprocity as

*The **norm of reciprocity** requires that people **repay in kind** what others have done for them.<sup>[1]</sup> It can be understood as the **expectation that people will respond to each other by returning benefits for benefits**, and with either indifference or hostility to harms.*

## Messaging about Community Transport.

I hope I have demonstrated that Community Transport promotes social inclusion, fights exclusion, connects people to communities and builds social capital as well as addressing equity issues for those people who cannot use other forms of transport to maintain their lives, their lifestyle, their connection and participation within their own communities. Or in other words to continue to live the lives they have and want to because their mobility issues can be managed effectively through use of Community Transport.

So how can we communicate this massive social impact which CT has. That's for another day but I want to draw your attention to Values Framing as a concept for this and leave you with the resource: The Common Cause Handbook.

When we message about Community Transport we need to message to the values of social justice and social equity.

Note: Thank you to Murray Coates for reviewing the final draft and providing sage commentary

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0739885923000306#:~:text=The%20idea%20is%20that%20by,of%20losing%20their%20local%20networks.>

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norm\\_of\\_reciprocity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norm_of_reciprocity)